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SUBJECT: GREGOR GYSI - PIED PIPER OF THE LEFT

Classified By: Ambassador Philip D. Murphy for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: Left Party Caucus Chief Gregor Gysi told the Ambassador during a November 23 meeting that he alone was responsible for building The Left as a national force. He is aiming for The Left to enter all state parliaments by 2013, after specifically targeting North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in 2011 and Bavaria in 2013. By that time he also hoped The Left would gain the Minister-President position in Saxony-Anhalt. That said, Gysi admitted that the western and eastern divisions of The Left were oil and water -- only combinable due to Gysi's alchemy. Gysi praised President Obama's election as the event of the century. He said his party differed with the United States on only one issue - Afghanistan - and military force could not prevail. He suggested that his party's call for the dissolution of NATO was needed in order to derail a more radical party effort to call for German withdrawal from NATO. Gysi said he would be traveling in February to Cuba (and "old friend" Fidel Castro), Honduras, Nicaragua (and "friend" Ortega), Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia and Columbia (one "rightist" country). Gysi said he and Lafontaine agreed that Gysi would run the party's "foreign policy." End Summary.

12. (C) Gysi recalled that the eastern German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which had been largely the former East German communist apparatus, combined with western German radical groups several years back to build "The Left." It had not been easy. He recalled his own biography, saying the PDS was created to represent Eastern German interests. He said that Easterners were represented in all state parliaments, and were now interested in running governments. However, in the western states the rabble-rousers making up The Left had never been elected to anything. He recalled the Essen party convention this year where all The Left groups bickered and fought during the entire convention, the result being plunging polls in the subsequent European Parliament elections. However, when the party later came to Berlin for a convention, Gysi took over and taught the party the errors of its previous (fighting) ways. The result was unanimity. Gysi said this unanimity was his greatest achievement leading to the September election successes.

13. (C) With a national party, Gysi said he now had the attention of other parties in the Bundestag. Previously, everyone had written off the PDS as regional and irrelevant. Now, he could speak authoritatively. He said that The Left had received 8.3 percent of the votes in the western German states due to the fact that the Social Democratic Party (SPD) had surrendered its "left alternative" ways in order to mimic the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU). This had been a fortuitous opening that The Left had exploited.

14. (C) Asked about differences with the United States, Gysi said the only real issue was Afghanistan. He asserted that the military would never win in Afghanistan, and argued that openness and engagement were the only tools that would work. He reviewed former West German tactics since the end of WWII in opening up the GDR as an example. Gysi did not point out differences over NATO policy (The Left is calling for dissolution of NATO in favor of a broader -- as proposed by Russia -- security community) but tried to suggest the

Party's call for dissolution of NATO was a way to avoid the more dangerous path of pulling Germany out of NATO. He explained that the United States, France and UK would have to agree to dissolve NATO, and that was unrealistic. Gysi tried to criticize U.S. policy on Cuba, claiming isolating enemies did not work. However, he backed off at the mention of President Obama's new efforts with Cuba.

15. (C) Regarding the condition of The Left Party Chairman Oskar Lafontaine since his November 19 operation for cancer, Gysi said that he speaks to Lafontaine daily and that he expects Lafontaine to return to work. Gysi said he planned to visit Central and South America in February and the United States in July. He hoped to visit New York, San Francisco and L.A. He noted that the uncle of his wife currently resided in Chicago. Gysi had been to Chicago previously. He said he had no plans to visit Russia since things there were too "uncertain" at present.

16. (C) Comment: Gysi was gregarious and chatty. He welcomed the possibility of meeting with embassy representatives to discuss issues such as Afghanistan or NATO. He repeatedly stressed how impressed he was with President Obama, and wished he could meet him someday. This was the first time we can recall an ambassador meeting with Gysi, who is easily one of Germany's most renowned talk show participants and parliamentary icons. His rhetorical flourishes and sly intellect are evident from the start. He speaks little more than bits and pieces of English.

MURPHY